

# "I'm Not the Great Hunter, My Wife Is" Inupiat and anthropological models of gender

---

Barbara Bodenhorn\*

**Résumé:** «C'est pas moi le grand chasseur, c'est ma femme»: le genre selon les Inupiat et selon l'anthropologie.

Les sociétés de chasseurs-cueilleurs ont souvent servi de référence aux discussions théoriques sur le genre. Cet article examine quatre thèses répandues dans la littérature anthropologique à propos de la position relative des hommes et des femmes (la chasse est l'apanage de l'homme; la société inuit est dominée par l'homme; le domaine public est contrôlé par l'homme; seuls les hommes «travaillent»).

L'ethnographie du North Slope Alaskan montre qu'aucun de ces modèles ne fonctionne pour les Inupiat car ils reposent sur des conceptions ethnocentriques de la chasse, du mariage et du genre. Par exemple, la chasse ne se réduit pas à la capture et à la mise à mort de l'animal, mais comprend de façon essentielle un ensemble d'activités techniques et symboliques où l'indépendance de l'homme et de la femme est fondamentale.

**Abstract:** "I'm Not the Great Hunter, my Wife Is": Inupiat and Anthropological Models of Gender.

Hunter-gatherer societies have often been used to support theoretical discussions about gender relations. This article examines four models, widespread in the anthropological literature, about the relative position of men and women (men hunt; men dominate Inuit societies; men control the public sphere; men "work"). The ethnography of the Alaskan North Slope shows that none of these models works with the Inupiat as they are based on unexamined assumptions about the meaning of hunting, marriage and gender. For example, hunting cannot be reduced to the catching and slaughtering of animals, but rather includes a whole set of activities, both technical and symbolic, in which the interdependence of men and women is fundamental.

---

One of the questions addressed at the 1990 Inuit Studies conference at which this paper was presented was how people working in the North might contribute to anthropological theory. It seems useful to consider the articulation of hunter/gatherer material with anthropological theory from at least three perspectives. Each is based on

---

\* Pembroke College, Cambridge, England, CBZ 1RF.

different assumptions, poses somewhat different questions, involves a different audience and generates different sorts of answers. First there is the question of how social scientists working with people defined as hunter/gatherers model to themselves what they are doing and who they are working with. The volumes emerging from the Hunter/Gatherer conferences (CHAGS) as well as the heated debates to appear in *Current Anthropology* in recent years reflect these conversations<sup>1</sup>. Then there is the question of how other anthropologists use hunter/gatherer material to formulate general theoretical models. To a great extent, this has been and continues to be, at least implicitly, informed by evolutionist models of social organization and the anthropological search for origins. Thus anthropologists have frequently turned to 20th century hunting and gathering societies for evidence to explain the development of social relations in human societies generally<sup>2</sup>. Finally there is the question of anthropology as cultural critique. The discipline has long been put forward as one in which the study of others allows for greater understanding of ourselves, although as has been pointed out more than once, anthropologists often fall long short of the goal. It is here that the following paper is primarily placed, for it compares Iñupiat models of gender with those used in anthropology in order to examine assumptions underlying the latter. Both should be considered cultural constructions, or, as Ann Fienup-Riordan has said, "ways of knowing" (1986)<sup>3</sup>.

Although ethnographers working with hunter/gatherers have taken from contemporary theoretical debate<sup>4</sup>, less use has been made by others of hunter/gatherer material in non-evolutionist anthropological models regarding, for instance, property, exchange, leadership, kinship or personhood. The study of gender relations has made frequent use of hunter/gatherer material in general and of Inuit material in particular. Gendered relations among hunter/gatherers have primarily been examined in relation to the

- 
- 1 Chronologically presented, Leacock and Lee 1982, Schrire 1984, Ingold, Riches and Woodburn 1988 reflect the changing concerns of the International Conferences on Hunting and Gathering Societies; Headland and Reid 1989, Solway and Lee 1990. Wilmsen and Denbow 1990 and Barnard 1991, among a number of others, have carried on in particular the debate concerning the problematic classification of hunter/gatherers as an anthropological category; see Smith 1991 and Bird (forthcoming) for current overviews.
  - 2 see Engels 1896, Friedl 1974 and M. Rosaldo 1974 for models of the formation of gender inequalities, for instance; Ingold 1986, 1990 regarding hunters as opposed to others as well as, of course, Sahliins 1968, 1972; Barnard 1991, Testart, 1981 and Woodburn 1980, 1982 are among those who begin with their own hunter/gatherer material to formulate general models of social organization.
  - 3 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Cambridge Social Anthropology Faculty Seminar in March, 1990. I would like to thank Nurit Bird, Ernest S. Burch, Jr., Simon Coleman, Caroline Humphrey, Raymond Neakok, Sr., Leona Okakok and Frances Pine for their discussion on issues explored here. The information under examination was given to me by Iñupiat between 1980 and 1986. Fieldwork material which was gathered between 1984 and 1986, was supported by the Iñupiat History, Language and Culture Commission, the Alaska Humanities Forum, a Chadwick studentship, Wolfson College, the Audrey Richards Fund and the Smuts fund. Additional information was told to me while I worked for the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (I.C.A.S.) between 1980 and 1983.
  - 4 Questions concerning the relationship between anthropology and history, for instance, are addressed by Leacock and Lee, Solway and Lee, Wilmsen and Denbow, cited above; the theoretical categories of property, production and territoriality have been refined by, among others, Ingold, Riches and Woodburn 1988, Williams and Hunn 1982 and Wilmsen 1988; R. Rosaldo 1982 provides a critique of the anthropologist's "need" for "savages", while Blackman 1990 and Shostak 1982 address the problematic issue of the authorial voice.

56/B. BODENHORN

presence or absence of egalitarian relations in societies with a sexual division of labour and a relative lack of private property. These questions are important, but they assume a centrality of gender as a structuring principal which must be examined. Fienup-Riordan argues in this volume that animals and humans, not genders, form the major structuring axes of social relations among the Nelson Island Yup'it of Southwest Alaska. Her general thesis is valid for the North Slope as well, although, as this paper will argue, gender continues in the latter case, to be an important vehicle for marking not only relations between women and men, but also between humans and animals. My aim is less to remove gender from the equation than to examine despite many efforts to the contrary, Euro-American tendencies to naturalize gendered difference which in turn lead to Euro-American assumptions about its significance.

The anthropological models to be considered, then, are among those which use hunter/gatherer material to argue general theories about the position of women in society. The first two include general hunter/gatherer models frequently appearing in the literature; the third and fourth are more general assertions whose proponents have often used hunter/gatherer material either to support or to challenge the model. They are as follows:

- 1) Men hunt; women gather; only men regularly hunt big game (*e.g.* Cashdan 1989).
- 2) Men's say in running social affairs rises in direct relation to the proportion of hunted meat in the total diet (Friedl 1974). With a virtually all-meat diet, Eskimos thus appear at the top of the list of male-controlled societies.
- 3) Men dominate the public/political/social sphere; women exercise power (if at all) in the private/domestic sphere (*e.g.* Rosaldo 1974).
- 4) Development generally worsens the position of women, particularly in classless societies (*e.g.*, Leacock 1982; see Moore 1988 for review). As men are drawn into the labor market, women often take up a greater proportion of the subsistence tasks, ironically becoming more devalued because they earn fewer wages.

These models (men hunt; men dominate Inuit societies; men control the public sphere; men "work") have all come under examination during the past decade<sup>5</sup>. Convincing examples and counter-examples have been produced for all of them. None works with Iñupiaq material because, I suggest, basic assumptions about what it means to hunt, to be married, or about how persons are gendered remain unexamined<sup>6</sup>.

---

5 See Moore 1988; Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988; Strathern 1988 for recent general reviews. Briggs 1974, Fienup-Riordan, 1986, Guemple 1986, Guérin 1982, Léveillé 1986, and Saladin D'Anglure 1986 have all addressed the issue of gender relations among Inuit; less explicitly addressing the model, but nevertheless relevant are Blackman 1990, Chaussonet 1988, and Turner 1990.

6 Iñupiat is the name of the people who inhabit the North and Northwest coasts of Alaska and literally means "real people". The adjectival as well as the singular form of the word is Iñupiaq. When material refers to Canadians as well as Alaskans, "Inuit" is used in accordance with the International Circumpolar Conference resolution of 1978. Iñupiat themselves rarely use the term to signify anything more specific than "people". The spelling of Iñupiaq words follows the conventions of the Iñupiaq History, Language and Culture Commission as of 1986.

I shall argue that Iñupiaq women, and most particularly wives, are considered pivotal to successful hunting. Wives ritually attract the animals and are thus classed as hunters by Iñupiaq men. An examination of ways in which Iñupiat talked about this model of animal/human relations mediated by marital relations allows us to broaden radically the Euro-American model of hunting. I shall suggest that many cultural constructions (among them Euro-american models) also gender knowledge, skills and most particularly space in ways that should not be assumed. Iñupiaq material allows alternative, less gendered, suggestions to be put forward. I am not presenting a model of pan-Inuit social relations. Although Canadian ethnography is used as well as Alaskan material, it seems likely that the morphology as well as the ideology of gendered relations may shift significantly between Siberia and Greenland. Nor is this material being used as a single case to refute a general Western model. Rather, as stated initially, the comparison allows us to assess more fully some of the assumptions underlying many Euro-American academic models.

After providing an overview of gendered relations on the North Slope, I shall return to the models, and to the questions posed above. Practices vary widely in the circumpolar North; the material presented here relates to ways Iñupiat from Barrow and Wainright talked to me about social relations between 1980 and 1986. The images may stem from traditions developed centuries ago; they also include images incorporated during the last hundred and fifty years of Euro-American contact; they pertain to the present.

## **The setting**

Barrow, Alaska lies on the shore of the Arctic Ocean, almost exactly halfway between the Canadian border and the Bering Strait. It is the major community of the North Slope Borough, an Iñupiat controlled home-rule government which covers roughly 88,000 square miles of northernmost Alaska. Today, as in the past, migrating bowhead whales, beluga, seals, walrus and water fowl provide large and varied sources of protein and rivers furnish easy access to inland resources (fish and caribou). Intercontinental trade from Canada to Siberia, once a source of both staple and exotic goods, no longer exists. Instead, relations with the Federal Government and multinationals must be carefully negotiated, largely due to the discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay in 1968.

## **Social organization**

Iñupiaq kinship organization closely resembles many Canadian Inuit societies: kinship is bilateral and fluid; intensive interaction with extended kin is high; marriage is easy to enter, and easy to end; adoption is frequent; and naming is important in maintaining relations with the dead.

Inupiaq "persons" are complex beings. Children are frequently thought to choose when to be born and thus, from the earliest moment, exercise individual will. But names (which may be given by several people and which may continue to accrue to one well into adulthood) also carry personal characteristics. Children take on at least some of the essence of the person whose name has been given. They are considered to be "a vehicle" for the name. In addition, during the course of growing up, one may receive the *ilitqusiq*

## **58/B. BODENHORN**

(spirit, or personal knowledge) of a relative in the grandparental generation which then also becomes part of one's personhood. Neither naming nor the passing on of *ilitqusiq* is tied to gender: both may be given to and received from men and women.

Just as becoming a person is an incremental process, so is entrance into kinship relations which are based on a bilateral kindred and include affines and adoptions, which are frequent. During a lifetime, one continually adds onto one's existing relatives. In addition to those acquired at birth, each name introduces an additional set; adoptive family becomes primary, but does not replace natal kin; marriage adds affines to consanguines; divorce does not terminate the relatedness of the respective families; after death, one's spirit returns to enliven a child with yet another set of kin.

Within a virtually infinite universe of potential kin, the pragmatics of social behavior means that non-kin may become kin by acting like relatives and kin may become non-kin by denying, implicitly or explicitly the moral content that dictates the obligations kin have toward one another. Whereas obligations to immediate family are virtually irrevocable (*i.e.*, there is no socially acceptable reason for not meeting them), the remainder may be more or less negotiable. The boundary between these two categories is somewhat permeable; it varies from person to person as a matter of individual definition as well as position in one's life cycle and may vary from context to context.

On the North Slope at least, generation is more important than gender as a hierarchical principle. To the extent that any individual can impose his or her will on another (which is limited), an older sister may tell a younger brother what to do, an aunt may chastize a nephew, or a young woman who has directly expressed a negative opinion to a young man may explain "I could talk to him like that because he is my cousin/age-mate".

In the 19th century Iñupiat resembled Siberian Yup'it more than Canadian Inuit in their economic organization. Whaling and trading were conducted to accumulate wealth, most successfully by the Arctic "big men", the *umialiit*, or whaling captains. Only in Alaska, did this develop in conjunction with the *qargi*, often translated as "men's house"<sup>7</sup>. Only in Alaska has the discovery of oil generated not only intensive contact with Euro-American institutions, but also significant wealth under Iñupiaq control. And only in Alaska has whaling never ceased to be an important economic, social and cultural resource.

## Men, women and work

Among Iñupiat, hunting is considered "hard work" and women frequently speak of their husbands' labors with respect and appreciation; husbands openly recognize their spouses' contributions as well. Indeed, Guemple (1986: 14) asserts that on Belcher Island, "work" is defined as something one does *for* (his emphasis) someone of the other gender. This generally holds for the North Slope as well.

When I asked questions about women's or men's work and looked at what activities seemed classified by gender, they reflected almost exactly the division of labor as set out by 19th century ethnographers (Murdoch, 1892; Simpson, 1875). Men make tools, hunt and fish. They might hunt alone, with a spouse, or with other partners. Larger animals

---

7 This is a problematic translation, which is discussed later in the paper.

(bearded seal, walrus or beluga, for instance) are frequently pursued in groups. Women fish, hunt occasionally, help to butcher, preserve and prepare the food, tan the skins, sew (both clothing and the skin covering of the whaling boats) and take care of the children.

Although siblings could occasionally be called on to provide these services, the marital partnership was and is the ideal form within which this division was enacted by adults. A couple could operate virtually as a self-sufficient dyad for much of the year — and indeed, several couples recounted to me with relish how they did exactly that. An adult should be able to do the gender-appropriate work and should be attached to a spouse who would reliably do the rest.

It should be emphasized that this is a gendered, not a sexual, division of labor, for there is nothing in this model that assigns a 'natural' meaning to the tasks that men and women perform. Men and women are not thought to be somehow congenitally incapable of doing something generally assigned to a member of the opposite sex (see also Briggs 1974). According to Murdoch (1892), for instance, going out in the whale boat was considered a man's job. If there was a labor shortage, however, women were immediately recruited, a not uncommon occurrence as reflected by Charles Brower's experience in gathering together his first whale crew:

My next recruit was Toctoo [Brower's wife and, according to her daughter Sadie Neakok, an excellent hunter in her own right (Blackman 1990)]...

The women worked in the whaling crews the same as the men, were just as good at paddling and did not seem afraid of going alongside of a whale<sup>8</sup>.

Similarly, Murdoch (1892: 413) talks about a woman who is "a good shot and a dab hand at deer hunting" and who chooses to go hunting rather than accompany her husband on a trading expedition. If a woman was "a crack shot" (and I have known several), she was considered skilled rather than un-womanlike. Traditionally it was a woman's job to bring the hunted meat back home. Consequently, they knew the land as well as their husbands, were better dog handlers than men, and "often better trackers" (Burch, personal communication). Conversely men's hunting kits always contained a set of sewing tools. A split seam in one's clothing at -40° demands immediate repair. The more you know how to do, the more likely you are to survive. Certainly today, "survival" was the most common reason given in answer to questions about why people did one thing rather than another.

Whaling involves cooperation that extends well beyond the marital couple. Whale crews endure over time. Members may be, but are not necessarily related and each crew includes the specialized positions of harpooner, captain (*umialik*) and his wife ("the whaling couple" according to Patrick Attungana 1986: 16). Once a whale is struck, all available crews help tow it close to the village and many people are recruited to pull it onto the ice, butcher it and take it to shore. Redistribution rules effectively ensure a flow of whale meat throughout the community over the course of the annual cycle.

It is important to distinguish in Iñupiaq distribution practices, between "sharing", an on-going process of reciprocity, — and "shares" — a portion of the catch earned by individuals. In general, access to "shares" is determined by one's contribution to the means of production or by labor. If you contribute food to a whaling crew, present a

---

8 Brower n.d.: 117-118. Charles D. Brower was among the first Euro-American whalers to live in Barrow year-round.

hunter with a rifle, help to butcher an animal, or even, as I discovered to my pleased surprise, help to retrieve ducks that have fallen in the water, you earn "a share", or *ningik*. This is not gendered. A woman who owns the harpoon (a "male" instrument) of a successful whale crew, or who helps to butcher a bearded seal (a "female" activity) will earn a "share". Meat that circulates as a function of "sharing" has not been earned; one is not entitled to it; it is given as an expression of on-going animal/human reciprocity and received in that spirit. The person who does the giving is obliged to share, but chooses to whom and how much he or she will give away.

I have discussed this distinction between "shares" and "sharing" more fully elsewhere (1988; 1989). Here I suggest that the animals themselves fall into two categories: animals whose "shares" are divided only among participants in the hunt and animals who explicitly provide "shares" to the entire community. The former (seals, caribou, walrus, etc.) are divided on the tundra, the ice and in or near the house. How they are divided is not a matter of public record, but is left up to the individuals involved. The other group (polar bear, beluga, bowhead whales) are butchered on community territory and shares are distributed not only to those who have taken part in the hunt, but to all community residents as well. In particular, the whale serves as a focus of community celebration.

Today this gendered division of labor continues in relation to hunting; the Euro-American world of schools and jobs seems much less marked. As of 1980, approximately the same number of Iñupiat men and women were employed in Barrow (252 and 229 respectively). During the 1970s, most men worked in construction jobs (75%) which were highly paid, seasonal, and offered enough flexibility to allow men to continue hunting. Men also filled the top positions in the local ANCSA corporations as well as in North Slope Borough, all of which had liberal "subsistence leave" policies<sup>9</sup>. At the start of the decade, working women were most frequently found in permanent "pink collar" jobs, but by the late 1970s they had begun to move into some professional and technical jobs (Kruse 1981: 35f). That trend continues. Between 1980 and 1987, women held positions, among others, as Mayor of Wainwright, City Manager in Barrow, Chairman of the Board for both Atkasuk and Barrow Village Corporations, Elementary School Principal, Executive Director of the Alaskan Eskimo Whaling Commission and representative in the State legislature. Questions regarding the nature of recent changes frequently elicited the response that "men have a harder time of it, maybe; their minds are somewhere else" (Alice Solomon, interview).

### **Husbands, wives and the animals: the cosmology of marriage**

Among Iñupiat, as among Northern hunters in general, hunting is a sacred act. Animals give themselves up to men whose wives are generous and skillful; it is also the man's responsibility to treat the animal properly, but it is the woman to whom the animal comes. Shortly after my arrival in Barrow in 1980, preparations for fall whaling began. I mentioned something to Ernie Frankson, a Point Hoper, about "only men hunting". He looked at me for a moment and said gently, "the whale comes to the whaling captain's wife". When asking Leona Okakok about this, she remembered one very successful inland hunter who simply said, "I'm not the great hunter, my wife is". He

---

9 ANCSA stands for the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act which "gave" indigenous Alaskans control over territory and resources through the creation of regional and village corporations.

was alluding to her generosity, not to her skill with a rifle. Confirmation of this from other men was consistent: "yes, these were very strong beliefs"; "it has been like that from way back".

When a man has killed an animal, its soul, its *iñua*, must be treated correctly. Marine animals should be offered a drink of fresh water by a woman, for instance, and land animals should have their heads severed in order to allow the soul to escape. The hunter's wife butchers the animal and shares at least some of the meat; the animal's spirit recognizes her generosity, is pleased, and offers itself up to the hunter again. Just as the carcass is transformed into food, so, customarily, the hide might be transformed into a "second skin" for the hunter, clothing skillfully sewn to please the animals and thus attract them (Chaussonet 1988). The woman's needle according to some, "makes the hunter" (Johnston 1988: 168; see also Briggs 1974).

Customarily, wives had ritual responsibility to ask for the animals. Dinah and David Frankson of Point Hope relate how wives would ask the moon for animals and good health. The whaling captain's wife would ask for whales in the spring; all the others asked for game animals throughout the year. "Whatever Alingnaq (the man in the moon) put in a woman's bowl, that was what her husband would get during his hunting activities" (Pulo 1980: 15-6). It is the woman's job to attract the animals and thus, to hunt.

In pre-contact Ifupiaq society, there was no institutionalized way to live as an adult outside of marriage. How this was expressed within the system of ideas becomes clearer when listening to people talk about the consequences of losing a spouse. According to Bessie Ericklook of Nuiqsut, "This is what we have always known. When a mother loses a husband, she can sew, or she can get food by begging or working for it. But when a husband loses a wife, he can't do anything". Ida Numnik of Barrow reiterated this principle from a male perspective:

I always remember what Kagak said. When he lost his wife, he came over to see me. He told me I was able to do a lot because I was able to mend his kids' clothing. But when a husband loses a wife, even if he has a lot, here is no way he can do it<sup>10</sup>.

On the surface this seems a little odd. If you have lost a wife, you ask someone else to sew for you in exchange for meat, just as Kagak was doing in the above anecdote; you ask your sister to take care of your children for a while, or to butcher the share you received on a hunting expedition. All of these strategies are exercised. The idea that "there's no way he can do it" is precisely that — an idea informed by conceptions about the nature of husbands and wives. A man must have a wife to whom an animal gives itself. A woman, on the other hand, can benefit from others' obligations to share which must be met in order to keep the animals coming back.

The spousal relationship is even more marked for whaling. Indeed, Lowenstein working in Point Hope, suggests that a traditional *umialik* "cannot operate without a woman partner" (1981: 8). Rainey detailed several mutual ritual responsibilities which would have been carried out by *umialik* couples in the early 20th century. The husband hired a skilled craftsman to make the special wooden pot from which the wife would offer a welcoming drink of water to any whales caught by him. The wife hired an old woman

---

10 Both Ericklook and Numnik comments were made during the Ifupiat History, Language and Culture Commission 1980 Elders' Conference, taped special session on childcare; Raymond Neakok, translation.



to make special mittens to be worn when carrying the pot and she made the whale-hunting boots to be worn by her husband during the whaling season. She played an important role during the launching of the *umiaq* (whaleboat) and then returned home, placing the special pot and her husband's drum by the entrance of their house. He, in turn, wore her belt and kept her left-handed mitten in the boat. She provided the drink of water to the whale, as mentioned above; then, after butchering, offered her husband a drink from the same pot. The pot, cooked meat, hunting charms, amulets, the hammer used to make the pot and shavings from the paddles was then placed under a tripod formed by three paddles and the wife threw a parka over the tripod<sup>11</sup>.

Shamanic ritual further expressed this interdependence. When called upon to encourage the animals to give themselves up, shamans frequently had to rely on a ritual spouse — male or female — to complete the proper tasks. According to David Frankson, in "the old days", if the ice did not open in time for spring whaling, an *angatkuq* (shaman) was sent to the *Itivyaat*, people who lived under the ground.

Whenever a male *angatkuq* was sent to the *Itivyaat*, the wife of a captain was sent to carry the *angatkuq*'s divining rod.... The men did not hesitate to give up their wives for this purpose because of the necessity to catch a whale. It is said that Kataliuraq [Frankson's grandmother] was chosen to go to the *Itivyaat*. However, since she was a woman, a captain was named to follow her. In the case of a female *angatkuq*, a man is chosen to follow her. They went to any length in order to catch a whale, even to the extent of giving up their spouses to the *angatkuq*. No spouse was too precious<sup>12</sup>.

During the whaling season, whaling captains' wives must move slowly in their homes, think peaceful thoughts, and act generously. A clue as to why this might be so is revealed in a story recorded by Rasmussen: Raven exhausts himself over the water and falls into the jaws of a whale. He tumbles "right into a house, a beautiful, lovely house where there was light and warmth. On the platform sat a young woman busy with a burning lamp" (1952: 24-6). The woman is the soul of the whale, her lamp is its heart. It is the woman at the hearth that gives the whale life. Thus, to tie story and contemporary images together, the whale-woman in her house sees the whaling captain-woman in hers, senses her welcoming spirit, decides, in Attungana's (1986) words, that this is a good place "to camp" and offers itself to the whaling crew<sup>13</sup>.

Once the whale is caught, its body — its parka — must be treated correctly, specifically by the whaling couple so that subsequent years will be successful. Three times during the year: *Nalukataq*, Christmas and Thanksgiving, successful whaling couples feast the community and distribute "shares" with the help of the men and women on their crews. These occasions encompass both "shares" and "sharing"; community members receive "shares" — and also receive the hospitality of a feast. The "whaling couple act as good hosts" to the whale by sharing its meat with all (Attungana 1986: 16f). These celebrations take place in public spaces: the beach in the spring and the churches in the winter. The distribution is conducted by pairs of male and female crew

---

11 Rainey 1947:245; 259-264. See also Pulo 1980.

12 David Frankson, in Pulo 1980:52.

13 See Attungana, 1986 for an extended contemporary description of how whales decide to whom they will give themselves up. This was an address made to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commissioners in 1985. Today in Barrow, I did not hear the story of the whale-woman-spirit, although the conviction that the whales see and respond to the welcome held out by the whaling captain's wife is very strong.

members and the prepared food is consumed communally. Throughout the year, the whaling captain and his wife must distribute food to individuals who are in need on a daily basis.

Today, belief in the vital relationship between whales and humans and in the importance of the welcome prepared by the whaling captain-wife continues to be strong. In the spring of 1986 when the final interviews for this project were conducted, several women essentially told me to come back after whaling; it was not the right time for them as whaling captains' wives to talk about anything that might include troublesome issues which would break their peaceful frame of mind. Although few, if any, women continue to clothe their husbands entirely in the skins of hunted animals, their skill in creating pleasing patterns for public occasions, warm parkas for hunting and a clean new *qatignisi* (whaling shirt) at the start of each season, remains highly valued.

The spiritual connection between humans and animals other than whales is much weaker in many young peoples' minds, although not entirely absent. Some of the ways these beliefs continue, however, slipped by me while I was in the field because they were so much less marked than whaling practices. Several men mentioned that their wives were their "favorite hunting companions", which I took to be evidence of an affable, companionate marriage. I now think it also has to do with the animals coming to the wife. On reaching young womanhood, some women are told by their fathers they could no longer go camping with the family until they were married. Within the kinship sphere, it is "wives", not "women", who attract the animals.

## Discussion

With this material, let us consider anthropological and Iñupiat models together.

**Anthropological model:** men hunt; only men regularly hunt big game.

**Iñupiat model:** "I'm not the great hunter; my wife is".

Among Iñupiat, "hunting" is defined to include attracting, killing, butchering, transforming the animal into food and clothing (which attracts), and following the proper rituals, all of which are needed to maintain amicable animal/human relations. The bigger the game, the more explicit the wife/woman role in procuring it. Without a wife, the *umialik* is unprepared to fulfill his role; without women to dress the *umiaq* (whaling boat), the crew cannot navigate the spring ice; without the male and female crew members to distribute the whale meat and *maktak*, the "whaling couple" cannot act as proper hosts which they must do to ensure the whales' return in coming years. All of this is hunting, marked by gendered interdependence.

If my argument were simply that among the Iñupiat, as among the Agta, for instance, a significant number of women learn and exercise male hunting skills without incurring social disapproval, this would merely add an interesting counter-example to the general model that men hunt. This kind of material could — and very likely should — be pursued in light of Saladin D'Anglure's (1986) suggestion that such women are primarily those thought to have switched sex at birth.

The above is true. In terms of cultural critique, however, the important point is that women's activities — sewing, butchering, sharing — are classed by Iñupiat as hunting skills. The anthropological model begins with an unexamined definition of hunting: seeking out and killing animals by means of material technology. Iñupiaq definitions clearly extend well beyond the physical act of slaughter. As such, they should encourage a more thorough assessment of the basis upon which anthropological categories are constructed. If anthropology is to persevere in its comparative project — and I firmly believe that it should — anthropologists must approach every basic category with scepticism.

**Anthropological model:** Inuit societies are male dominated.

**Iñupiaq model:** "when a husband loses a wife..., there is no way he can do it".

The interdependence of men and women for survival is acknowledged and appreciated. The sexual division of labor is culturally constructed as one in which all participants have crucial ritual responsibilities. "Real work", like "real food", is connected to hunting. Gendered work usually referred to this sphere. Earning money was not categorized according to gender in the same way. Not only is woman's labor visible and valuable, it is under her control. The shares that she earns are hers by virtue of her labor, not her attachment to a particular man, family, or household, thus making it easy for her as well as a man to move into the world of wages. Women's labor and their role in sharing hunted meat places them at the center of productive/ distributive relations, not on the periphery as marginal dependents.

The importance of women as distributors of hunted meat is found in many, if not most, hunting societies. We must distinguish between groups who may say similar things ("we share our food"), but work out actual distribution practices differently. We must also distinguish between groups who may do almost exactly the same things, but provide their actions with different meanings. According to Sharp (1981), the Chipewyan of Canada have a sexual division of labor almost exactly that of Iñupiat; men and women are interdependent and it is women's job to turn hunted meat into "food". Within the ideology, however, men are dominant. Animals give themselves up to the man. They are equated with wolves, predators, who are valued, whereas women are classified with dogs, who are devalued as scavengers. Their work, although crucial to everyday survival, is invisible in much the same way as French peasant or non-working American housewives. Among Iñupiat, women and men not only work hard, but they are seen to work hard. It is what makes them attractive as marriage partners.

Sewing is perceived as skilled labor which, if you must fend for yourself, earns you shares from other hunters, or money from itinerant whites. When a woman sews for her husband, her needle creating a second skin that will attract the animals, she is acting ritually as wife the hunter. It is the ritual, not the labor, that is gendered. And it is the context, not the activity that creates the ritual.

Among Iñupiat at least, male/female interdependence is absolutely explicit in the cosmology of marriage; the generosity of the wife in sharing meat and the skill of her needle which "makes the hunter" are central in attracting the animals to the husband. Thus wife the hunter is every bit as important as husband the hunter. Both must be skillful and ritually proper.

The definition of "domination" is clearly problematic; it has informed anthropological and sociological debate for generations, never more heatedly than during the 1970s when an early alliance between feminism and anthropology was preoccupied with the question of the universal subjugation of women.

While avoiding the overall question, this material illuminates two critically difficult areas in the task of anthropological model-making: the problem of evaluating and interpreting others' ethnography, and the problem of generalization. Much of the general model of male dominance in Inuit society is based on specific practices such as "wife-swapping" and female infanticide. Balikci (1967) uses pan-Arctic demographic data as well as his own ethnographic material from the Pelly Bay Inuit to argue convincingly that female infanticide was practiced throughout the entire circumpolar region. The pattern for Iñupiat, which he bases on Stefansson material, is called into question by earlier information from Murdoch (1892: 416) and Simpson (1875: 250) as well as by subsequent information gathered by Burch (1975)<sup>14</sup>. On another level, Balikci points out (1967), that the unbalanced numbers of female to male children are evened out by an extremely high accident rate for adult males so that adult numbers are more or less equal. It then becomes questionable whether the initial practice can accurately be described as one of male domination. The image of "wife-swapping" has been soundly attacked by Burch (1974) who argues that multiple spouses (*aipaq-aipaq* marriages) were as much a matter of female as male decision. The former is an example of good ethnography inaccurately generalized; the latter more probably a case of biased interpretations of ill-understood behavior.

Murdoch (1892: 413) states categorically: "Women appear to stand on a footing of perfect equality with men in both the family and the community". Spencer (1969: *passim*) presents a much more male-dominated picture<sup>15</sup>. As I have argued in this paper, Iñupiat women have had, and continue to have, control over their own labor, can initiate divorce, and are ideologically represented as central to successful animal/human relations. Today they work in both public and private positions of acknowledged responsibility. The ethnographic argument that this society is relatively male-dominated is difficult to sustain. The larger anthropological problem is how to treat a category such as "domination" in such a way that it may be analytically useful. It cannot be asserted in light of one or two characteristics, but must be considered as a complex of factors such as authority, power and autonomy in terms of social, economic and political relations.

**Anthropological model:** men control the public sphere, women belong to the domestic sphere. This is implicit in Inuit ethnography when *qargich* — the major extra-household institution among Alaskan Yup'it and Iñupiat — are labelled "men's houses", for instance. Similarly, Graburn (1973) and Saladin D'Anglure (1986) specifically associate women, houses and wombs among Canadian Inuit.

---

14 Iñupiat have certainly left infants by the side of a trail to die of exposure if not quickly found and picked up. According to archival sources and to people talking to me, this was done only under the threat of starvation, usually when the family was on the move and involved the youngest child, of either sex. The babies, if adopted, were called "miracle babies". Burch (1974) makes a convincing argument that these actions were in fact an attempt to save the child's life. The point is not to challenge Balikci's ethnography, but to question the generalization.

15 Although Spencer (1969) claims to reconstruct "traditional" Iñupiat society, his informants were born at the end of the 19th century, the era of most intensive, traumatic commercial whaling. He describes that period, not an earlier one.

**Alternative model:** whales mark the communal sphere; smaller animals nourish the kinship sphere; men and women are explicitly incorporated into both<sup>16</sup>.

I have suggested that animals' shares may be classified as belonging to a kinship (private) or communal (public) sphere. I thus suggest that the public sphere for Iñupiat is animalized, not genderized. Those animals classified as communal resources, most explicitly bowhead whales, belong to the public realm where both men and women must act correctly to maintain the proper relationship between animal and human worlds. Smaller animals come to individual hunters and their wives; their "shares" being earned by those involved directly in the hunt.

*Qargich*, whose membership coincided (and in Point Hope continues to coincide) with whaling crew membership, were daily loci of such ritual activity. They may have been places where only men worked during the day (although several elders suggested otherwise); evening activities — dancing, story-telling and shamanic performances — took place with men and women<sup>17</sup>. The whaling couple have specific ritual responsibilities to ensure a successful whaling season, as described above. They are also dependent on several women to dress the whaling boat (by sewing its skin covering) which will protect the hunters as they travel through the spring ice. And they are dependent on male and female crew to carry out the communal distribution during the whaling feasts which will encourage the whales to return the following year. Husbands and wives need each other to ensure that animals are provided to the household; men and women need each other to maintain inter-societal relations (the societies being animals and humans).

Importantly, an argument can be made that these boundaries, like so many others, are permeable and transformative. The whaling-captain-woman is indeed associated with the home, but it is here that she attracts the whale, the animal most bound up with community. Domestic in this instance becomes communal.

**Athropological model:** one of the effects of "development" is to feminize the subsistence sphere.

**Iñupiaq model:** men have had a harder time with the recent changes.

I have just suggested that women's control over their labor allows them to move easily into waged (public) employment. I suggest as well that gender neutral ideas about knowledge likewise provide access to the public sphere, and consequently influence women's experiences with "development". Leadership positions such as *umialik* or *angatkuq*, have long been associated with skills and knowledge, neither of which is gendered in the manner of Euro-American models. David Frankson's grandmother Kataliuraq exhibited shamanic knowledge and thus was sent "to the other side" to procure animals. Today a woman with specialist political knowledge may be sent to the

---

16 See Bodenhorn (forthcoming) for a more extended discussion of the assertion that Iñupiaq communities are divided into kinship and community spheres.

17 Although "men's house" seems to be the common translation for *qargi* today, this has not always been the case. Taylor (1990:51) lists the gamut of translations assigned to the kashim across the Arctic, most of which emphasize a celebratory, social function: ceremonial house, communal house, dancing house, feasting house, festival house, singing house, social house, etc. These seem to be more accurate than "men's house".

legislature to represent Iñupiaq interests. The principle that knowledge should be shared and put to community use, regardless of whose knowledge it is, has meant that women assume positions of responsibility much more easily on the North Slope than in Cambridge, England.

As suggested above, waged work has neither been classified as a male domain, nor as somehow more real or intrinsically valuable than hunting. In fact, it is the entire complex of activities described above as hunting which continues to constitute "real work" or, in Alaska, "subsistence". For men, this entails going out on the tundra or the ice to hunt. Earning money is needed for survival, but it conflicts with what men have to do to maintain their responsibilities to the animals and to their fellow humans. Women, whose ritual work is based in the community (sewing and butchering), can more easily accommodate "real work" and jobs.

**Anthropological assumption:** the world is divided into men and women; the study of gender is the study of the relations between them.

Underlying all of the above anthropological models lie certain assumptions about the fixity of gender and, despite many attempts to the contrary, its equation with biology. Euro-American models tend to assign a gender to a person — and to define them by what they do. "Masculine" is what "men" do.

**Iñupiaq construction:** Iñupiat talk about the world in a way that emphasizes a constant potential for transformation.

Iñupiaq "persons" are complex beings. If one has several names, one's several sides may conflict ("he's got too many names; they fight all the time!") or they may fit together harmoniously ("like a story"). Personhood, then, is not necessarily tied to gender. People may receive names, and thus personal essence, from either sex. It is an individual process. Names flow between specific persons, not age groups, classes of people or genders. Which name comes to the fore depends on whose company one is in. The possibility of an infinitely expanding kindred allows one to negotiate who is a relative depending on the context. Animals may raise their masks, revealing a human face to communicate with humans. Hunters may wear a second skin of animals to attract the animals. If the world is contingent, flexible and transformative, it would be surprising if gender were fixed.

## References

- ATTUNGANA, Patrick  
1986 "Address to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission", *Uiñiq: The Open Lead*, 1(2): 16ff, (James Nageak, translation).
- BALIKCI, Asen  
1967 "Female Infanticide on the Arctic Coast", *Man* (NS), 2: 615-625.

68/B. BODENHORN

- BARNARD, Alan  
1991 "Primitive Communism and Mutual Aid: Kropotkin visits the Bushmen", 1991 A.S.A. conference paper, Cambridge, England.
- BIRD-DAVID, Nurit  
in press "Beyond the Original Affluent Society: a Culturalist Reformation", *Current Anthropology*.
- forthcoming "Between Nature and Nation: On the Mode of Subsistence of Modern hunter/gatherers", *Man*.
- BLACKMAN, Margaret  
1990 *Sadie Brower Neakok: the Story of an Iñupiaq Woman*, Seattle, University of Washington Press.
- BODENHORN, Barbara.  
1988 "Whales, Souls, Children and Other Things that Are 'Good to Share': Core Metaphors in a Contemporary Whaling Society", *Cambridge Anthropology*, 13(1): 1-18.
- 1989 *The Animals Come to Me, They Know I Share; Iñupiaq Kinship, Changing Economic Relations and Enduring World Views on Alaska's North Slope*, unpublished Cambridge Ph.D. thesis.
- forthcoming "Gendered Spaces, Public Places: Public and Private Revisited on the North Slope of Alaska", in Barbara Bender (ed.), *Political Landscapes*, Oxford, Berg Press.
- BRIGGS, Jean  
1974 "Eskimo Women: Makers of Men" in Carol Matthiasson (ed.), *Many Sisters*, New York, Free Press: 261-304.
- 1986 "Expecting the Unexpected: Canadian Inuit Training for an Experimental Lifestyle", paper delivered at the 4th International Congress on Hunter/Gatherers, London.
- BROWER, Charles D.  
n d *Diaries from ca. 1889-1927*, Fairbanks, University of Alaska Archives.
- BURCH, Ernest S., Jr.  
1975 *Eskimo Kinsmen: Changing Family Relations in Northwest Alaska*, New York, West Publishing Company.

- CASHDAN, Elizabeth  
1989 "Hunters and Gatherers: Economic Behavior in Bands", in Stuart Plattner (ed.), *Economic Anthropology*, Stanford, University Press.
- CHAUSSONNET, Valérie  
1988 "Needles and Animals: Women's Magic", in William Fitzhugh & Aron Crowell (eds), *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska*, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press: 209-226.
- ENGELS, Friederich  
1972 [1896] *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, New York, International Publishers.
- FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann  
1986 "The Real People: the Concept of Personhood Among the Yup'ik Eskimos of Western Alaska", *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 10 (1-2): 261-270.
- FRIEDL, Ernestine  
1974 *Women and Men: an Anthropologist's View*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- GRABURN, Nelson H. H.  
1973 *Circumpolar Peoples: an Anthropological Perspective*, Palisades Pacific, Goodyear Publishing Company.
- GUEMPLE, Lee D.  
1986 "Men and Women, Husbands and Wives: the Role of Gender in Traditional Inuit Society", *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 10 (1-2): 9-24.
- GUÉRIN, Yvonne  
1982 «La femme inuit dominée, création mythique allochtone?», *Anthropologie et Sociétés*, 6(3): 129-154.
- HEADLAND, Thomas N. and Lawrence A. REID  
1989 "Hunter/Gatherers and their Neighbors from Prehistory to the Present", *Current Anthropology*, 30(1): 43-66.
- INGOLD, Tim  
1983 "The Significance of Storage in Hunting Societies", *Man (NS)* 18: 553-71.
- 1986 *The Appropriation of Nature*, Manchester: University, Press.

**70/B. BODENHORN**



- 1990 "Comment on Jacqueline Solway and Richard Lee, Foragers, Genuine or Spurious? Situating the Kalahari San in History", *Current Anthropology*, 31(2): 145.
- INGOLD, Tim, David RICHES and James WOODBURN (eds)  
1988 *Hunters and Gatherers*, vols. 1 & 2, Oxford, Berg Publishers.
- IÑUPIAT HISTORY, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE COMMISSION  
1980 Elders' Conference tapes of special session on child care, (Raymond Neakok, Sr. translator).
- JOHNSTON, Thomas F.  
1988 "Community History and Environment as Wellspring of Iñupiaq Eskimo Songtexts", *Anthropos*, 83: 161-171.
- KJELLSTRÖM, Rolf  
1973 "*Eskimo Marriage*", Lund, Nordiska Museets Handlingar Berlungska Boktryckeriet.
- KRUSE, John  
1982 *Subsistence and the North Slope Iñupiat: An Analysis of the Effects of Energy Development*, Man in the Arctic Series, 56, Anchorage, University of Alaska Institute of Social and Economic Research.
- LEACOCK, Eleanor  
1982 "The Place of Women in Hunting Societies", in Eleanor Leacock and Richard Lee (eds), *Politics and History in Band Society*, Cambridge, University Press and Paris, Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- LEACOCK, Eleanor and Richard LEE (eds)  
1982 *Politics and History in Band Society*, Cambridge, University Press and Paris, Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- LOWENSTEIN, Tom  
1981 *Some Aspects of Sea Ice Subsistence Hunting in Point Hope*, Barrow, North Slope Borough.
- MOORE, Henrietta  
1988 *Feminism and Anthropology*, Cambridge, University Press.
- MUKHOPADHYAY, Carol. C. & Patricia J. HIGGINS  
1988 "Anthropological Studies of Women's Status Revisited, 1977-87", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 17: 461-95.

- MURDOCH, John  
1892 *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition*, Ninth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1887-88, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office.
- PULO, Tupo  
1980 *Whaling: a Way of Life*, Anchorage, University of Alaska, National Bilingual Materials Development Center.
- RAINEY, Froelich  
1947 "The Whale Men of Tigara", *Anthropological Papers of the Museum of Natural History*, 41 (2): 231-483.
- RASMUSSEN, Knud  
1952 *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition: 1921-24*, v. 10, posthumous notes on the Alaskan Eskimos, edited by H. Ostermann, translation W.E. Calvert, Copenhagen, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag.
- ROSALDO, Michelle  
1974 "Woman, Culture and Society: Theoretical Overview", in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds), *Woman, Culture and Society*, Stanford, University Press: 17-42.
- ROSALDO, Renato  
1982 "Utter Savages of Scientific Value", in Eleanor Leacock and Richard Lee (eds), *History and Politics in Band Society*, Cambridge, University Press: 309-325.
- SAHLINS, Marshall  
1968 "Notes on the Original Affluent Society", in Richard Lee and Irving DeVore (eds), *Man the Hunter*, Chicago, Aldine.
- 1972 *Stone Age Economics*, Chicago, Aldine Atherton.
- SALADIN D'ANGLURE, Bernard  
1986 «Du foetus au chamane: la construction d'un "troisième sexe" inuit», *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 10 (1-2): 25-113.
- SCHRIRE, Carmel (ed.)  
1984 *Past and Present in Hunter/Gatherer Studies*, Orlando, Academic Press.
- SHARP, Henry S.  
1981 "The Null Case: the Chipewyan", in Frances Dahlberg (ed.), *Woman the Gatherer*, New Haven, Yale University Press: 221-244.

72/B. BODENHORN

- SIMPSON, John  
1875 "Observations on the Western Eskimo and the Country They Inhabit From Notes Taken During Two Years at Point Barrow", *Arctic Geography and Ethnology*, London, Royal Geographic Society.
- SMITH, E.A.  
1991 "The Current State of Hunter/Gatherer Studies", *Current Anthropology*, 32 (1): 72-75.
- SOLWAY, Jacqueline S. and Richard B. LEE  
1990 "Foragers, Genuine or Spurious? Situating the Kalahari San in History", *Current Anthropology*, 31(2): 109-46.
- SPENCER, Robert F.  
1969 *The North Alaskan Eskimo: a Study in Ecology and Society*, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution.
- STRATHERN, Marilyn  
1988 *Gender of the Gift*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- TAYLOR, J. Garth  
1990 "The Labrador Inuit Kashim (Ceremonial House) Complex", *Arctic Anthropology* 27 (2): 51-67.
- TESTART, Alain  
1981 «Pour une typologie des chasseurs-cueilleurs», *Anthropologie et sociétés*, 5(2): 177-221.
- TURNER, Edith  
1990 "An Iñupiaq Woman's Story of Spirit Power: A Key to Subsistence and Healing", precirculated papers for the 1990 Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, Fairbanks, Alaska: 261-275.
- WILMSEN, Edwin (ed.)  
1989 *We Are Here: Politics of Aboriginal Land Tenure*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- WILMSEN, Edwin N. and James R. DENBOW  
1990 "Paradigmatic History of San-speaking Peoples and Current Attempts at Revision", *Current Anthropology*, 31 (4): 489-524.
- WILLIAMS, Nancy and Eugene S. HUNN (eds)  
1982 *Resource Managers: North American and Australian Hunter/Gatherers*, Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

WOODBURN, James

1980 "Hunters and Gatherers Today and the Reconstruction of the Past", in Ernest Gellner (ed). *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, London, Duckworth and Company: 95-118.

1982 "Egalitarian Societies", *Man* (NS) 17: 431-51.

**74/B. BODENHORN**